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Org 1 Mafia

The Bonannos helped Papa Doc battle CIA for control of Haiti

By BOB THOMAS
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TUCSON—In the Haitian capital of Port au Prince in 1963, a plush gambling casino catering to the international jet set was being operated by the Bonanno family of Tucson.

It was all legal, thanks to an exclusive license given to the Bonannos by black dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

Then, according to the April issue of True magazine, President John F. Kennedy decided that Duvalier's repressive regime must be toppled. The late President entrusted the job of deposing Papa Doc to the Central Intelligence Agency, despite the CIA's very recent failure to overthrow Castro in the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

The Arizona Republic has learned that the Bonanno family played a major role in keeping Duvalier in power and that this assistance has earned them the enmity of the CIA.

The struggle between the CIA and the Mafia for Haiti, as detailed in True magazine, is mainly factual, sources close to the affair have told The Republic.

Not true, these sources said, is the magazine's claim that Duvalier allowed Joseph "Joe Bananas" Bonanno, the elderly and ailing reputed Mafia chieftain, to hide out in his Port au Prince palace while he was mysteriously missing.

Shortly after the casino began operations, Bonanno was reported to have been kidnaped on the streets of New York City just before he was to testify before a federal grand jury investigating an organized crime conspiracy.

For a full year he dropped from sight, leading many law enforcement officials to speculate he had been murdered and his body hidden in a secret Mafia graveyard. There also was speculation the "kidnaping" had been staged and that Bonanno was voluntarily hiding out, a theory which gained much support when he suddenly reappeared.

During this time, various criminal elements were battling for control of rackets in New York which allegedly had belonged to Bonanno. The gang fight, known as the Banana War, after Bonanno's alias, resulted in the death of

Bonanno's son, Salvatore "Bill" Bonanno, told The Republic it was he, and not his father, who set up the gambling arrangement with Duvalier and who spent considerable time in the dictator's palace.

"Yes, it's true, I was there in 1963 and afterwards," said Bill Bonanno. "That's no secret. Anyone who really wanted to find out would only have to check my passport or the visa forms."

"I've nothing to hide. I've been there at least a half-dozen times, sometimes with my wife, flying over on Pan American Airlines, \$165 a round trip."

Bonanno, a University of Arizona graduate who now lives in San Jose, Calif., said his family had gambling concessions in Cuba before Castro took over and more recently in the Dominican Republic, which shares the same island with Haiti.

Bonanno said that on the occasions he was in Haiti his father was not there.

"I don't know where he was during this time. When he finally showed up I told him, 'Look, you and I both know about federal grand juries. So I don't want to know where you've been. Don't tell me. Maybe when we're both much older you can tell me. But if I don't know I can't be accused of perjury before a grand jury'," the younger Bonanno said.

After Bill returned to this country, the Haiti gambling casino was managed in behalf of the Bonanno family by a friend, Vito de Filippo, under the casino permit granted by Duvalier.

During the following years the U.S. government put increasing pressure on Haiti, including clandestine attacks by CIA agents, the True magazine article stated.

In 1968 the CIA-sponsored a bombing attack on the national palace using an American-piloted bomber. Haitian militia frustrated several ground attacks, exterminating one CIA-trained force to the last man, according to the magazine.

Duvalier found he was unable to obtain weapons almost for the asking. So, True magazine reports, Duvalier turned to the Mafia for guns. Other sources told The Republic that Duvalier issued a legal contract, in French, for arms procurement from the Mafia agents. It was in the delivery operation that the Mafia clashed with the CIA. Despite intensive surveillance and rigid inspection of all Caribbean shipments, a large quantity of surplus GI weapons found its way to the French-speaking black nation, according to the magazine. True said the mob went to Italy and managed to secure a number of surplus U.S. submarine chasers and PT boats from friendly Rome contacts. These boats were routed through a number of phony consignees in various countries before winding up in Haiti as part of Duvalier's defense force. Ironically, some of these very same boats were involved in the abortive revolt against Duvalier April 24 in which his palace was shelled. The ships and crews later were given U.S. asylum. Meyer Lansky, the article said, now controls gambling in Port au Prince. Lansky, who was active in gambling throughout the Caribbean, especially in the Bahamas, is attempting to establish hotel-casino-real estate combines in Haiti.

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